

755 Thus, cures of cattle and human beings, as well,
776 bring in the fairy-lore. The good people may take
[239] anything from hens to men and women. When
they mysteriously sap the strength of a man or
woman, leaving him or her sick or weak and listless,
he or she is little recognizable as the strong helper
and friend of former years. The vitality has gone
out of him or her. The country-people can believe
that 'they' have spirited away the real person and
left in his place "some spent old man that they
had with them for a long time". The real person is
'away'. Cures, both religious and responding to the
fairy-cult, must bring him back. That does not
mean that they do not recognize what we might
• [753] call natural sickness or disease; they do, only too
well, from bitter experience. It means only that
they have an explanation for it that infuses it with
the associations they have about their belief.

776 For the belief in changelings, about which you
all have heard a great deal, has its root in the
fairies' 'taking'. In fact, it is sometimes said, as
it was to Lady Gregory, that "all persons who die
[761] are taken, except the old people". Only for them is
death the natural course of events; all others have
fallen prematurely into the power of the super-
natural forces.

776 Thus we can see that the countryman's fairy
183 belief is not entirely a catalogue of wonders, by
82 any means. Nearly all the disturbances of his inter-
ests and sentiments can be brought into the scope

give base to sentiment in mundane affairs can be projected into the after-world. One must act toward 'them' in death as one acts toward the living; one must do the 'friendly' thing. Thus they can tell a story in Luogh of a man there who they say "was walking along the road and he saw the ghost of his brother. He didn't say anything to it and it walked home with him all in silence. They sat at the fire for a long time, the [living] man waiting for the other to go, so he could go to bed. Finally, the dead man said: 'You have put me to great trouble tonight by not saluting me when we met. I must go now and now I won't be able to defend you in the council in the rath.' And it was true for him, too: the cow that was ailing with the man was taken the next week."

Thus, you see, one can envision 'them' both in mystic terms and in terms sometimes very bald and intimate indeed. The younger people in Luogh still follow the old belief, though they leave its expression to their elders. Yet they could explain the tumour on an old man's head in words which show how near 'the other people' are and how direct is the aid one's friends among them can give:

"Old Seumas was coming along the road drunk and he met a crowd of them on the road and one of them slapped him. If he'd taken the slap he'd be all right but he took off his coat and dared any one of them to stand down to him. They beat him and

181 gave him a terrible knock over the poll. One of
183 them that was great friends with him saved
● 753 him."

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181 Nor are 'they' always fearsome, even in their
183 most wondrous apparitions. The dead are too
775 much a part of life in rural Ireland for that. For
the old people they are too near; too many friends
have crossed the line between this world and the
next.

Thus the dead may come to cover nearly every
association of life; in the eyes of some of the old
people, the other world of wonders where the
'other people' reign spreads all about them. To the
initiate in such mysteries there is nothing to fear.
Let me give you my record of one conversation of
mine with a very old man of North Clare, a man of
clear mind and great folk-learning. His answers to
my naïve questions will show you how well he felt,
accepted and expressed the symbolic order of the
countryside:

I asked what a 'cowl' was. "They are the houses
where the family has died out of them. People
would live in them if they wasn't too bad, falling
down and dirty. You often see old people sitting
in them." "What people?" I asked. "The people
that used to be in it," he replied. "Do you mean
ghosts?" He answered me scornfully: "You might
see lights in the cowl and you going along the road
at night and you pass people you don't know and
you can't tell if they are ghosts or not. Of all the

832 believed in, or at least spoken of, though not practised. It is called the spancel, and is thus described by C. O.:—"This spancel, called in Irish 'stheiolu dhrum agus tharragh,' signifying the skin of the back and of the belly, consists of a continuous band of skin taken from round the length of the body, viz. from the side of one foot up the outside of that leg and side, over the head and down the other side to the sole of the other foot, up the inside of that leg and down the inside of the other, until the stripe meets where it first set out; it is used as a love charm, and its power is believed to be irresistible, it being only necessary in order to secure the affections of the victim, to tie the spancel round him while asleep; if he does not awake during the operation all *must* turn out to the wish of the operator; if he does awake, he dies before the end of the year, so the poor desired one has no escape." The same author mentions several instances of this, which were said to have occurred shortly before he wrote (1841), one of which, the discovery of three young women taking the spancel off a corpse, is still remembered by some of the older inhabitants. There are several holy wells in the district, but the most famous is the well of St. Brendan, on Inishglora, the water of which is said to remain sweet and pure if drawn by a man, but to turn bloody and become full of worms if a woman has the temerity to take it. Many tales are told of the misfortunes which have happened to women who persisted in drawing water from this well after being warned. There is now resident in Belmullet an old man who lived for some years on Inishglora. This man solemnly declared to the Rev. P. O'Reilly and the writer that he had three times cleared out the well after women had taken water from it, and that on each occasion it was "full of blood and corruption"; he also said that from the time he began to clean out the well until the job was completed no water flowed in, though it began to come as soon as the cleansing was finished. He added that if a woman were left alone on the island with only a male child of a month old, and she wanted to get water, the vessel would have to be held by the child's hand to prevent the water from becoming bloody.

752 [753] 2. *Charms and Leechcraft.*—Disease is often ascribed to supernatural agencies, and for this reason is often treated by charms or incantations. There are several local "wise" men and women who treat disorders partly by means of charms, partly by herbal and animal remedies. In some cases the idea underlying the treatment

14: Westropp B-4, 5 (no date) 1910-12
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County Clare

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Collectanea.

- 824 *Plants.*—The "hungry grass" grows on mountains, and, if
● 753 trodden on, causes a sickening hunger which kills if not relieved.
I knew a man in County Limerick who said he "knew it to
757 happen to another man" on the Clare hills, and the victim got
824 food in bare time to save him.³⁰ Seven strips of a plantain leaf
[752] stop the bleeding of a bad wound. The "Seven Sisters" plant
for healing purposes must be picked at a particular period of the
sun and moon in August. Fern "dust" (seeds) heals cuts from
rushes; the dock charms nettle stings; and the four-leafed sham-
rock brings luck if found accidentally. The belief that house-leek
424 preserves a house from burning³¹ is widespread in north and east
Clare. The pennywort has a sectarian bias, and only cures
Protestants,³² and this is connected near Bunratty with a curious
legend of Anne Boleyn. This hapless queen, after enjoying by
means of the plant the greatest influence over her terrible
spouse,³³ "got into trouble, but, when she was sent to jail, she
[777] couldn't get the plant, and they hanged her." The rowan, or
789 mountain ash, is a luck-bringer and preservative from magic, and
I remember small forked twigs being carried. A rowan, planted
at Iniscaltra about 890 by King Cormac mac Cuileanan, bore
apples.³⁴ Moss from a skull, or an ancient cross such as that at
Dysert O'Dea, or a pillar, is curative; the moss at Fortanne well
was used for the eyes, but had to be replaced. If you see a
"button mushroom" you should pluck it, as "it will never grow
any more once it is looked at."³⁵

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(To be continued.)

[P. 252]

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264 fork. It is not unusual for a man to eat six or eight large spuds at a sitting, and
415 the pot used to boil potatoes for a large family is piled high indeed. Spuds also
[231] are fed to cattle, poultry, and pets. The diet of families which are most prosperous,
[184] keep tourists, or whose members are acculturated is more varied than the diet that
I have just described, and these families utilize the shops more than is usual.

164 The excessive intake of carbohydrates, particularly by children, coupled
515 with the almost complete absence of dental hygiene, has resulted in universal
[62] tooth decay among the folk. Many people in their twenties and thirties already
wear false teeth, and toothache is the most common physical ailment. My wife
and I discovered but one adult who cleans her teeth, and she only once a week with

• [753] a cloth and toothpaste. The islanders eschew use of the toothbrush for several
reasons: some believe that bad teeth are inherited or decay is a contagious disease,
and nothing can be done to prevent deterioration once it has set in; others equate
decay with the common cold, a natural affliction suffered by everyone which must
be accepted fatalistically (and masochistically); while still others regard the tooth-

[62] brush as an English innovation or its use as an upper class affectation—"If I used
one they would say I had fancy ideas."—to be shunned on these grounds. A story
whose plot was laid in an island in the region of Inis Beag appeared in the
Saturday Evening Post, and was illustrated with photographs taken in Inis Thiar.
The Dublin model who portrayed the heroine in local attire was recognized as an
outsider by the folk who viewed the pictures because her teeth were white and even.

Clothing

291 The term traditional applied to the much publicized Inis Beag garb refers
177 to the homespun vests and trousers and blue woolen shirts of the men, the ankle-
178 length red and blue woolen skirts and a type of shawl of the women, and the
[184] cowskin shoes and woven belts worn by many men but only a few women. Some
of these articles of wear are shared with peasants of the region, or were in the past
and thus are vestigial; others are unique to Inis Beag; and all are in the process
of being replaced by mass produced mainland attire. Of 111 adult males in Inis
Beag, 11 have given up the local dress, as have 9 of the 85 adult females. Most of
these 20 have returned to the island from having spent time on the mainland or
abroad, and as a matter of prestige have chosen to retain the foreign costume.
Practically all of the young men past school age who have not been away dress
traditionally, but none of the women between ages 18 and 29 do; the youngest
women who wear the red or blue skirt are of the latter age.

294 Although most clothing worn by the islanders is tailored locally, everything
286 but the trousers and vests of the men are made from imported materials. Clothing
is tailored from cloth woven by the island weaver from Inis Beag wool which is
291 washed, dyed, and spun in the homes but carded on the mainland. The trousers
294 are brown or grey depending on whether a brown or black weft is combined with
[286] the white warp on the loom; they are called "britches" when styled differently as
to seam and hem. Vests also are brown or grey in front with backs dyed blue, and

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In Inis Beag, it is called "reading the Gospel (or Bible) at," and can bring illness or death and ultimate damnation within a prescribed time; the folk reason that if a cleric can cure with prayer, he also can cause illness and death by its use.

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One other control technique of the clergy must be mentioned—that of influencing civil servants to implement their wishes. One case among many that I recorded, based partly on rumor, will serve as an example of its potency. A middle-aged, unmarried man who anticipated inheriting land discovered that his widowed mother, with the advice of the curate and unknown to himself until the last moment, had "signed it over" to his younger brother who wished to marry. In his rage, the betrayed man threatened the priest who came to pacify him, and the following day he was removed to a mental institution. The folk accuse the curate of "forcing" the doctor to commit their neighbor, on the pretext that on occasion he acted "strangely" and held himself aloof from many of his fellows. Six months later he was released from the hospital as normal—according to Irish law which states that a patient under observation cannot be institutionalized for more than that period if declared sane—and he emigrated to England. Whether or not the curate prevailed on the doctor can never be known, but the islanders believe that he did and can cite equally extreme cases involving other priests and functionaries. The curate in question soon afterward was committed to the "mad-house" himself, which was, according to the folk, a form of divine punishment.

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Anti-clerical sentiment is strong in Inis Beag, although it is seldom manifested in acts of overt resistance to the will of the curate. An outsider must be careful not to voice a like sentiment, or, for that matter, evince agreement with diatribes directed against the clergy by islanders with whom he is conversing, or he will evoke a spirited defense of the church and be accused of anti-clericalism—or worse. The response of the folk reveals the deeply rooted ambivalence that they feel toward the church: how they revere its doctrines yet resent many actions of its representatives. An outspoken elder told me of his views concerning the church, which are shared by most of his less "bold" comrades: "The trouble with Ireland is the priests. They took over after the famine, when the population had halved and their number had quadrupled, and broke our spirit by preaching damnation and the sinfulness of sex. We came to depend on them instead of ourselves, and today they live off us but are strangers in our midst. They should be concerned only with the salvation of our immortal souls. Birds know more about God and his wishes for man than they do. The reason that we flee the country is to escape their control and the dull life they have created."

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Criticisms of past and present curates are so numerous that only the most repeated ones, which arouse the most resentment and anger when aired, can be taken up. There is a constant plea for older priests to be assigned to Inis Beag—men who have experienced life elsewhere in Ireland and abroad and know its countless facets, and who have developed compassion for the human condition—rather than the "young, pink-cheeked Maynooth Seminary graduates" who often are assigned. As well as being youthful and naive, the folk feel that too many priests have acted aloof and supercilious, have been unhappy with their Inis Beag post, and have marked time waiting for their tenure to end. Their lack of commitment has meant, it is believed, frequent shirking of their duties toward

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and other Christian vices are detested and are likely to become the butt of satirical anecdotes and ballads.

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In many primitive and peasant societies, in which Christianity has dispossessed polytheistic religions, it has been observed that polytheism has left a legacy whereby the Virgin Mary and various angels and saints are worshipped as dispensers of personal power in their own right. This has been extended to the Trinity among the Anang of Nigeria, who believe that God provided independent power for his human son, Jesus, with which to convert the world to Christianity, and for the Holy Spirit (who has joined the indigenous pantheon of spirits) to act for mankind as healer, prognosticator, forgiver of sins, and protector against ghosts, witches, and sorcerers (Messenger 1959:291). Most Inis Beag folk regard God and the Devil, among Christian supernatural beings, as the only possessors of personal power. But some think that power emanating from the deity is manipulated by the Blessed Virgin and particular saints, and they as well as he must be propitiated for best results. When asked why she prayed to St. Enda rather than to other saints, an old woman said that this saint is "nearer to God" and therefore able to capture more of his power than others. A few islanders hold that these intermediary entities possess power not emanating from the deity, and thus may be approached individually through prayer and sacrifice for their favor. The saints most often appealed are St. Patrick, St. Brigid, St. Enda, and the patron saint of the island.

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The Devil is thought to command power for evil as great as or greater than that of the Virgin Mary and the saints for good. Some believe that he controls malevolent pagan beings as well as his own minions from Hell, and he both tempts Christians to sin and attacks them bodily causing sickness, injury, and other misfortunes. He is abroad at all times, although his power is amplified on such occasions as Allhallows' Eve, and sometimes he can be seen by human eyes—as a huge, dark, indistinct figure standing at a distance, usually after nightfall or when it is raining heavily. One evening during a severe storm, I visited without advance notice a man milking his cow at the back of the island, and he would not approach me as I stood atrop a fence wearing oilskin and sou'wester until I called out to him and established the fact that I was not the "big fellow" come to do him harm. Animals are especially sensitive to the presence of Satan, and asses which run about braying loudly are believed to have seen him.

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The folk do not admit to dissent or skepticism as regards their Catholic faith, despite their anti-clerical attitudes, but skepticism can be inferred from many of their utterances. Most doubt centers around the reality of the hereafter and its nature, if it exists. Invariably when I talked of religion with them, whether singly or in groups, my own views of the afterworld were solicited eagerly, and such remarks as the following, pronounced with anxiety, were forthcoming from them: "Is there really a life after death?", "Will we meet relatives there?", "Is it bodies or souls that live in Heaven?", "If we all meet in Heaven, won't it be too crowded?", "How could God be so cruel as to put people in a big fire?", and "Sure, no one has ever returned to tell of the afterlife." The most public expression of skepticism that my wife and I encountered was in a pub when she was requested to sing "Galway Bay" before a crowd of boisterous men; after she sang the line, "And if

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and its fate. In further mocking his fellows for their apprehensions about death and its aftermath, he proclaimed that the soul, "if there is such a thing, goes nowhere after the heart stops beating."

Celtic deities no longer are a part of the belief system of the islanders, but the culture heroes of the Iron Age—such as Cuchulainn, Finn, and Oisín—still are extolled in legends, and the promontory fort and other ancient monuments and some of the geographical features (for instance, glacial boulders) in Inis Beag and nearby islands are explained by the actions of Celtic heroes. Spirits, demons, and witches of many sorts are the supernatural beings from the Celtic, and possibly pre-Celtic, era which figure most importantly in the pagan segment of the folk religion. They have become incorporated into orthodox Catholicism by being declared "works of the Devil" by those who admit to their existence (It is said that two priests of peasant background have admitted to this belief publicly in Inis Beag.)—a reinterpretation resorted to by many primitive and folk peoples under the duress of acculturation with dominance. The spiritual entities most linked with the Irish, both in writings and in popular imagination, are the trooping and solitary fairies, known to the islanders as the "little people," "good people," or "gentry." In Inis Beag, only the leprechaun and "red man" among the numerous solitary fairies are known. William Butler Yeats numbers the banshee, mermaid, pookah, and water horse among the solitary fairies (Yeats ND :76-77), but these are not regarded as such by the folk (The latter two are animal spirits, or demons, rather than human spirits.); also found in Inis Beag are the sea spirit, or "headless body," and other minor spirits and demons.

Fairies seldom permit themselves to be seen, but most of the islanders have experienced their presence, if only through having objects mysteriously misplaced by them or hearing them sing and cobble. These beings differ considerably in appearance—according to type, sex, and age—but most of them are knee-high and wear green jackets, flat red caps, and buckled shoes. The trooping fairies live in *clochán* and thorn bushes and spend most of their time feasting, singing, dancing, fighting, playing games, and making love. A spirited hurling match played by fairies on the strand was described to me by an observer who had witnessed it from a canoe approaching the island; he and his mates rowed close enough to overhear the creatures call out to each other by name. Small whirlwinds are a sign of their passing, and a farmer who was haying and failed to say the proper "God bless them.", as such a wind stirred his field, was punished by having all of the cocks that he had accumulated blown away. One verse of my ballad, poorly received by most islanders, tells of men who were afraid to board the freighter for several nights after trooping fairies had been seen dining in the mess and a ghost pacing the deck. Fairies disregard human beings most of the time, but they can harm those who disregard or speak ill of them, as well as play "fairy pranks" out of sheer capriciousness. One of their favorite modes of attack is to cast "fairy darts" at their victims; on the mainland, these are prehistoric flint artifacts, but in Inis Beag they are any small pebbles supposedly thrown from the sky to cause bodily harm. An Inis Thiar man collected a number of darts allegedly cast at him by irate gentry, only to have the collection confiscated by the curate in whom he indiscreetly confided. The most feared practice of trooping fairies is that of steal-

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ing souls of children and leaving in their place changelings, who gradually sicken and die. Since boys are favored over girls, Irish peasants of the region until recently dressed their male offspring in petticoats, sometimes up to the age of 18 years, to deceive the little people. Even now parents are loath to praise the health or beauty of their children for fear that the gentry will overhear and be prompted to victimize their souls.

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Solitary fairies are described by Yeats as "withered, old, and solitary, in every way unlike the sociable [trooping fairies]. . . . They dress with all unfairy homeliness, and are, indeed, most sluttish, slouching, peering, mischievous phantoms" (Yeats ND :76). The long occupation of Inis Beag by leprechauns is

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evidenced by the Garden of the Cobbler and a spring at the back of the island, shaped like the sole of a shoe, which is known as Well of the Boot. Occasionally a leprechaun has been seen in the former location, but only the sound of a tapping hammer has been heard in the latter. Instead of guarding a buried pot of gold at the foot of a rainbow, as popularly conceived, the leprechaun of Inis Beag possesses a small purse in which he keeps but a single coin. Children sometimes are urged to hunt for the hidden purse, as a distraction by harassed parents. The rift valley between Castle and High Villages is thought to be the home of at least one "red man." He wears a pointed cap to denote cleverness and has a laugh, as distinctive as the hammering of the leprechaun, by which his presence is known. A practical joker with poltergeist qualities, the red man prefers to frequent houses, where his mischief is countered with bottles of holy water. From November of 1959 until June of 1963, my wife and I experienced, first in Inis Beag and then in our home in the United States, the antics of an unseen being who opened doors and windows, turned on lights and water faucets, and imbibed our Irish whiskey. Tongue-in-cheek, we placed the blame for these uncanny occurrences on an amiable solitary fairy who had attached himself to us, but eventually I felt compelled to report our unique contact with the Celtic supernatural to the anthropological community—a gesture regarded as "poison oak in the scientific groves of academe" (Messenger 1962:367-373).

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The spiritual omens of death are three in Inis Beag: the sound of trooping fairies building a coffin for the victim, soft tapping on the window pane of his bedroom, and the wailing of the banshee during the night before his demise. No one has ever viewed the banshee, but many have heard her cry out in the night, and the keen of Celtic derivation is said to be an imitation of her funeral call.

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She attaches herself only to certain families which inherit her patrilineally. An aged Inis Beag man was seriously ill with influenza on the night that my wife and I sponsored a dancing party, and a young man departing from it three hours after midnight played his accordion as he walked to his home located near that of the sick person. On learning of this event, the nurse shortly after dawn hurried to her patient to assure him that the wails he might have heard came from the instrument of the inexpert youth and not from the family banshee; at this news, thanatomania was prevented and the man lived another three weeks, when the banshee at last cried and was heard by those at his deathbed. Opinion is divided as to whether it is the fairies or the banshee who announce death by window tapping, but as a practical joke islanders long ago used to tap on the bedroom windows of those persons considered overly superstitious.

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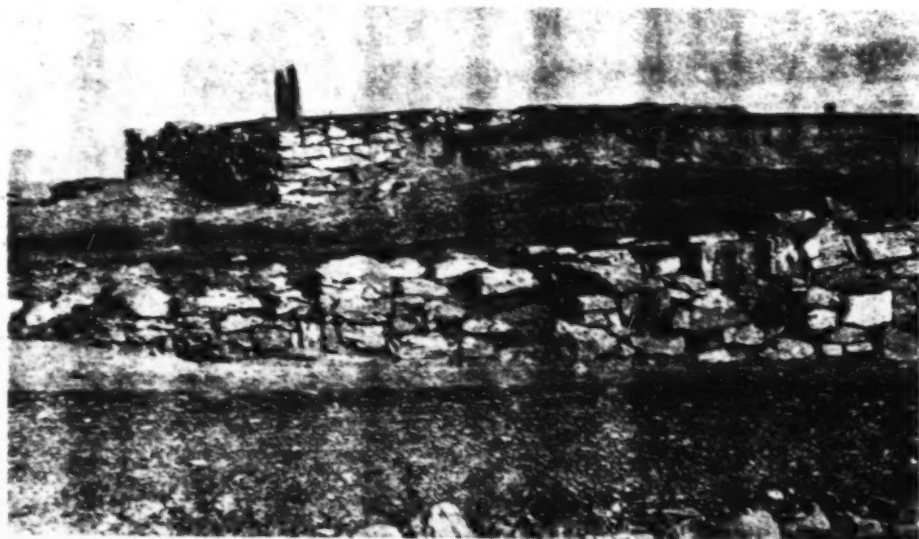


Figure 12. Copper-Bronze Age tumulus—home of the pooka

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black dog which roams the road by the Catholic church and cemetery in the village of St. Patrick, altering its size instantaneously (Messenger 1967:37-38).

Witchcraft once flourished in Inis Beag, so it is held, but today only the casting of the evil eye still is practiced. The most common witch of the past was an ugly old woman, called a "hag witch," who was native to Inis Beag or a transient nighttime intruder from nearby islands and the mainland. She was able to fly through the air swiftly, make herself invisible, assume any size or shape, enter the body of an animal, and perpetrate black magic. Her favorite animal familiar was the rabbit and her favorite target the cow, whose milk she purloined after midnight from beasts pastured at the back of the island. Like the trooping fairies, she too stole the souls of children and left ailing changelings in their stead. When it was suspected by parents that a child was a changeling rather than their human offspring, it was customary to throw it into the fireplace or burn the bedding on which it lay in order to retrieve the departed soul; if the perpetrator were a witch, she would leap from the flames with a "wild shriek" and vanish, leaving the restored child in perfect health in her place. I was told in Inis Thiar of islanders there who bear scars from being burned when their souls were rescued by this expediency.

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Three Inis Beag persons are accused of possessing the evil eye and thus are shunned by their fellows. Such a witch is known by a disfigurement in or near his left eye, from which the malignant force emanates, and by his ability to cause

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misfortune to those whom he compliments. The extent of his power is measured by how soon after the compliment his victim suffers, and how serious is the calamity. Most feared of recent witches is a man who as a youth caused a newly arrived curate on his first walk of the island to fall and break his leg; within seconds after the boy praised the vigorous stride of the priest, "the poor creature disappeared behind a fence, feet over head." The folk seldom compliment one another, and when they do they append "God bless you." to the statement as a precautionary incantation. Persons with the evil eye neglect to do this, it is said. I often have wondered—when in a mood to credit the existence of fairies which turn on water faucets in the dead of night—if a series of misfortunes which befell me during 1960 and 1961 was somehow linked to one of these persons wishing me a good year, without uttering "God bless you.", as my wife and I put off the strand in a canoe at the end of our research. The same incantation is voiced by those in the vicinity of one who sneezes—in this case to prevent his soul from being captured by the fairies. It is tempting to attribute the unwillingness of Irish peasants generally to pay compliments to the age-old but now forgotten dread of being accused of the evil eye and of inviting fairies and hag witches to substitute changelings for human children.

Priests of the church at least a century ago rid Inis Beag of most religious practitioners of pagan disposition, but there is evidence that before their acculturative influence was felt diviners and workers of good and evil magic practiced techniques which had their roots in the Iron Age. Divining now is restricted mostly to the seeking of omens by everyone, and the astrological and tea leaf reading skills of several persons who do not charge for their services. The principal workers of magic in the past were herbalists, animal doctors, and bone setters; an animal doctor in Inis Beag and a bone setter in a nearby island still ply their inherited specialties for pay, but both men claim that they are practical folk physicians and do not command pagan or Christian spiritual powers. Just as the islanders share a common body of omens which are used to avoid the misfortunes and compound the benefits in store for them, they also share a common knowledge of folk medicines, which some believe to be more efficacious than the medicines provided by doctor and nurse. Indigenous medicines once were prescribed by workers of magic, misnamed "herb witches"—old women who gathered plants at dawn and "brewed" them in a variety of ways to affect various cures. The dew on the plants, as well as the manner in which they were compounded, gave these medicines a magical potency. To meet such a witch as she was returning from collecting ingredients meant that one was doomed to take on the affliction of the patient being treated by the hag. A similar belief, well represented in the folklore of the islanders, is the transference of disease from a human being to an animal that he has befriended earlier.

Christian and Pagan Reinterpretations

The four quarterly festivals of the Celts were: Imbolc, celebrated on February 1st, Beltaine on May 1st, Lughnasa on August 1st, and Samhain on November 1st.

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181 and the never ending toil needed to maintain present subsistence standards; the
152 spying and malicious gossiping of their fellows and the ubiquity of jealousy and
[562] envy; the isolation of the island, particularly during winter months; numbing
boredom and the dearth of social activities; for women, the lack of freedom and
of attention and affection from their spouses, as well as the necessity of enduring
828 sexual relations; and, as stated above, hypochondria. Much has been written about
829 isolation and its depressive effects on the islanders, and the folk themselves constantly
[184] complain of being shut off from the world and prey to wind, rain, fog, and
raging sea. But isolation need not lead inevitably to depression, for my wife and
I conducted research in another island of Ireland—far distant from and even more
inaccessible than Inis Beag—where the inhabitants do not feel isolated and are
not depressed.

121 I have expanded the clinical usage of the term hypochondria to include
fears of the spirit as well as fears of the body, for ill health can as often be induced
by supernatural forces, and death—whether by disease, injury, or aging—is the
164 ultimate fear with its threat of eternal damnation. Colds, influenza, dyspepsia,
[160] migraine headaches, teeth decay, the crippling effects of joint and muscle ailments,
hypermetrophy, and mental illness are paramount among health concerns. "Flu"
[687] epidemics are frequent in the island and are a chief cause of death among people
who have become weakened by old age. As the folk advance in years, they come to
spend more time in bed and by the turf fire and venture out less during the winter
and when it rains. Drafts are avoided whenever possible, and clothes dampened by
[751] seas which wash the canoes or by rain are changed for dry ones at the first opportunity.
Colds, flu, indigestion, and headaches more than any other afflictions send
[757] the islanders to the nurse for drugs and to their own folk remedies for relief.
• [753] Dyspepsia is known as "wind" and is thought to result from diet, but the nurses
say that most cases of indigestion are the result of tension—"nervous stomach."
Nine cases of migraine were reported in Inis Beag during 1959, but many other
islanders, most of whom are women, suffer from "nervous headache" which can
[123] approach migraine in intensity of pain. Neither my wife nor I were ill during the
[757] winter of 1959 and 1960, even though we were abroad in all sorts of inclement
weather against the advice of our neighbors; when we began picking wild garlic
to season our food, it was reasoned that the condiment afforded us protection
against the flu, which reached almost epidemic proportions that year, and as a
result this folk medicine was used more widely and consistently than usual.

[114] Nativists and primitivists praise the health and hardiness of the folk and
boast of the absence of rheumatism and allied infirmities among them and the
sharpness of their sight. But, just as most adults past 30 years of age suffer from
decay and loss of teeth, they also suffer from muscle and joint ailments, caused by
the "damp and cold," and from far-sightedness. It is not known how many folk
wear glasses in the privacy of their homes, but only two persons, both men, wear
them publicly—and self-consciously when they do. Most glasses are not prescription
made but are purchased in mainland shops after many pairs displayed on the
counters have been tested, and often a single pair will serve the needs of all the
[829] elders of a household. The islanders among themselves constantly complain of these
[668] and other ailments, although some will praise the health and hardiness of the local

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population in the presence of strangers, to conform to the nativistic and primitivistic stereotype. Probably the most robust of the two dozen islanders past the age of 70 years believes that he will live to be 100 years old, because he continues to be active physically and doesn't "worry about the health;" he accuses his fellows of "worrying themselves into the grave" over matters of body and soul.

The etiology of mental illness as conceived by the islanders is varied and embraces both natural and spiritual realms. "Insanity" stigmatizes the victim and his family, often for many generations, no matter what its cause, and as many psychotics are treated at home—hidden from the probing eyes of strangers—as are incarcerated in the mental institution serving the region of which Inis Beag is a part. Statistics on mental disorders are hard to come by because of the opprobrium attached to insanity, but at least eight of the folk were institutionalized for various periods between 1940 and 1965. Only one of these is a woman and none were violent prior to admission. Inheritance, inbreeding, and the menopause are the natural causes most widely accepted by the islanders, but some claim that heavy blows to the head, acute alcoholism, and even prolonged emotional tension—or "nerves"—can induce insanity. In explaining why a former Inis Beag curate was committed to a mental institution, an old man revealed what is probably the most significant cause of mental illness in Ireland when he said that the constant association of the priest with a pretty housekeeper "drove him mad from frustration;" he advocated that only elderly, plain-appearing women (who will not "gab" everything that they know to "our man") be hired for the task.

Supernatural forces are believed capable of causing not only mental illness, but most other maladies and injuries as well. Pagan dispensers of ill health are vengeful or capricious fairies, ghosts, and witches of the evil eye, while Catholicism provides an unpredictable Devil, a deity who punishes sinful thoughts and deeds in this world as well as in the next, and priests who in Inis Beag often have interpreted the boundaries of sin according to Irish and personal criteria. In the case of certain folk stricken with mental disorders, I have heard specific causes put forth to account for their condition: parents who are second cousins, the evil eye of a neighbor, punishment by God for a particular misdeed, and a priest's curse. A man who mistreated his aged bachelor uncle before his recent death now is haunted with the specter of being struck down from the grave with sickness, injury, or madness by the shade of the uncle seeking revenge. His despair and erratic behavior arouse little sympathy from his fellows, who await the day of reckoning. The stigma of mental illness arises from its designation as inheritable or a sign of the deity's displeasure, both of which may doom those of generations to come. There is a strong suspicion among the folk that other maladies which are deforming or leave physical aftereffects once cured can be transmitted through inheritance. In this category are two mongoloids, one dwarf, one epileptic, one person with goiter, one with a cleft palate, and one who has recovered from poliomyelitis. These disabilities also can stigmatize a family.

Probably the most infamous custom associated with the Irish is their excessive intake of intoxicating drink, and certainly Inis Beag islanders are no exception to the stereotype. Men drink far more than women, but even though the latter widely condemn the practice many are known to send their children to the pubs

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[759]
[155] bathing his chest in the mother's absence. (In this case, Oedipal and sexual attitudes probably were at work in tandem.)

158 It must be pointed out that nudity is also shunned for "health" reasons, for another obtrusive Inis Beag character trait is hypochondria.

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[291] In some cases, however, it is hard to determine whether concern with modesty or health is dominant in a particular behavioral response. Fear of colds and influenza is foremost among health concerns; rheumatism and related muscular joint ailments, migraine headaches and other psychosomatic disorders, tooth decay, indigestion ("nervous stomach"), and hypermetropia are other widespread pathologies which cause worry among the folk—not to mention those of supernatural origin.

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[325] Secrecy surrounds the acts of urination and defecation. The evacuation of infants before siblings and strangers is discouraged, and animals that discharge in the house are driven out. Chickens that habitually "dirty" their nests while setting are soon killed and eaten. Although some women drink spirits privately, they seldom do so at parties. In part this is because of the embarrassment involved in visiting the outside toilet with men in the "street" looking on. One of the most carefully guarded secrets of Inis Beag, unreported in the many works describing island culture, is the use of human manure mixed with sand as a fertilizer. We were on the island eight months before we discovered that compost is not "street drippings" and "scraw," but decomposed

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feces. With "turf" becoming more difficult to procure from the mainland, some islanders have taken to importing coal and processed peat and burning cattle dung. The dung is prepared for use in difficult-to-reach plots at the back of the island when tourists are few in number; it is burned covertly because of the overtones of sex and poverty. Another custom that my wife and I learned of late in our research, due to the secrecy surrounding it, concerns the thickening of wool; men are required to urinate in a container and tread the wool therein with their bare feet.

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[462] Other major manifestations of sexual repression in Inis Beag are the lack of a "dirty joke" tradition (at least as the term is understood by ethnologists and folklorists) and the style of dancing, which allows little bodily contact among participants. I have heard men use various verbal devices—innuendoes, puns, and asides—that they believed bore sexual connotations; relatively speaking, they were pallid. In the song that I composed, one line of a verse refers to an island bachelor arising late in the day after "dreaming perhaps of a beautiful mate"; this is

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[154] [23] late in the day after "dreaming perhaps of a beautiful mate"; this is